

PRETERM LABOR AND PRETERM BIRTH

What are preterm labor and preterm birth?

Preterm labor is when you go into labor three or more weeks before your due date. This is too early and your baby can be born too soon. Many times, the causes of preterm labor and preterm birth are unknown, but practicing healthy behavior and staying in touch with your doctor or nurse can help lower the risk of preterm labor and preterm birth.

The Facts ...

Each year, 10 percent of newborns are born preterm in the United States. Preterm births account for about 75 percent of newborn deaths.

Reducing your risk of preterm labor and preterm birth:

- Get prenatal care early and on a regular basis.
- Protect yourself from getting a sexually transmitted diseases.
- Stay away from alcohol, cigarettes and drugs.
- Eat healthy foods daily.

The following signs may occur with preterm labor:

- Uterine contractions – a tightening of the uterus that occurs more than four times an hour
- Menstrual-like cramps
- Low, dull backache
- Pelvic pressure
- Intestinal cramps, gas pains or diarrhea
- Increase or change in vaginal discharge

Remember that these signs also can be a very normal part of pregnancy. It is important for you to always pay attention to how you feel and look for changes from your normal pregnancy experience.

What should you do to determine if you're having early contractions?

Empty your bladder. Then lie down on your left side to feel for contractions. To do this, use the tips of your fingers to push all over your uterus. A contraction makes the uterus feel firm and may make the outline of the uterus easier to feel. Remember, contractions can be painless!

If you feel more than four contractions in one hour, or have any other signs that labor is continuing:

- Call your doctor or nurse, and tell him/her what you are experiencing.
- Rest on your side for an hour.
- Drink two or three glasses of water or juice.

Don't ever feel like you are complaining too much or being a bother! This could be the most important decision you make for your baby.

Sources:

"Born Too Early: Preterm Labor and Birth" by Bobbi Kimsey, RN, BSN. SNM